

2-1-1971

# The Gilmore Period -- 1934-1940

Bruce E. Mahan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Mahan, Bruce E. "The Gilmore Period -- 1934-1940." *The Palimpsest* 52 (1971), 101-108.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol52/iss2/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).



## The Gilmore Period — 1934-1940

Eugene A. Gilmore, Dean of the College of Law, was President of the University from 1934 to 1940. His administration covered six years between Walter A. Jessup's period of eighteen years and Virgil M. Hancher's tenure of twenty-four.

On April 30, 1934, the Iowa State Board of Education announced that Eugene A. Gilmore would become acting president on July 1. At the June meeting of the Board, the appointment of Gilmore was made permanent.

The new president was called upon to serve in years of economic stress. Depression was spreading throughout the land. On Gilmore fell the responsibility not only of maintaining the University as a first class institution, but struggling to recover the lost measure of state support. The University held its own during this period. The record of achievement is positive in respect to financial recovery, retention and addition of key men, educational improvement, advancement of knowledge, and consideration for the moral and physical welfare of the student body. Gilmore was the leader who guided the University along the road to recovery.

The new president brought to his office an excellent educational background and an abundance



of administrative experience. For twenty years he had served on the University of Wisconsin College of Law faculty. He had traveled widely. He had served as Vice Governor of the Philippine Islands for eight years and as Acting Governor General for fifteen months. During this period he was Secretary of Public Instruction and a member of the Board of Regents of Philippine University. He was a man of rich background and broad experience.

At his inauguration, addresses were made by former Presidents John Gabbert Bowman and Walter A. Jessup, and a message from George E. MacLean was read. The momentum of the Jessup administration continued.

President Gilmore lost no time in working on the University budget. He asked for increases in 1935 and 1937 and received some gains each time, but restoration of funds was slow and painful. The increases were used to restore salaries. Gilmore's long experience with the Wisconsin Legislature and the Philippine Legislature helped him in his contacts with the Iowa General Assembly.

Requests for 1939 included \$300,000 for a new library, but it was deferred to enable Iowa State College to secure an appropriation to restore the Women's Gymnasium at Ames which had been destroyed by fire. The appropriation for 1939 was \$577,000 more than it was when Gilmore took office and within \$37,000 of the amount received in



1931-1932. From 1934 to 1939 the value of the University plant increased from \$18,735,971.98 to \$21,994,365.14—a total of \$3,258,393.16. This was a remarkable achievement in the face of nationwide economic stress, two years of drought, and the reluctance of the Legislature to appropriate funds for capital improvements. During this period, \$165,426.36 was received from the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation for the Fine Arts and Theatre Buildings. The Radio Educational Building was another addition to the campus and the Law Commons was built with Federal funds.

During the Gilmore administration advances were made in nuclear physics, radio education, extension projects, child welfare, as well as Liberal Arts curriculum changes. He appointed six college deans, a director, and the heads of many important departments. These included, in his first year, deans in the Colleges of Law and Medicine. In his second year he appointed deans in the Colleges of Pharmacy and Engineering, and in the Graduate College. He also named a Director of the School of Fine Arts and Iowa Memorial Union, and a new University Examiner and Registrar. Two Commandants of Military Science and Tactics served during his term of office. One of the deans, Wiley B. Rutledge, College of Law, was elevated to the United States Supreme Court. Dean George D. Stoddard, Graduate College, be-



came Commissioner of Education for the State of New York and later President of the University of Illinois. New department heads included Psychology, Botany, Chemistry, Home Economics, Pharmacology, Anatomy, Surgery, Bacteriology, Fine Arts, Dermatology, and German. In 1939 an attempt to abolish the College of Engineering by the Legislature was blocked by Dean Francis M. Dawson, faculty, students and alumni.

An atom smasher added to the equipment of the Department of Physics, the discovery of Vitamin K, progress in the control of dental caries, a new studio and a transmitter, with power raised from 500 to 5,000 watts, for WSUI, progress in Fine Arts, Music, and Drama, were noteworthy accomplishments of the Gilmore administration.

During this period a study and report by Samuel P. Capen, Chancellor of Buffalo University, for the State Board of Education indicated some overlapping in programs of the three institutions of higher education. He recommended that the enrollment in Engineering be limited to 500 students and that graduate work in Home Economics be confined to nutrition and child welfare. The State Board accepted his recommendations. An agreement in Journalism training was also reached whereby Iowa State College would confine its work to training in technical journalism.

Among other accomplishments of President Gilmore were his defense of academic freedom for the



faculty, sympathetic concern for the needs of students, the expansion of self help, increased dormitory facilities, and the support of religious activities on the campus. He took strong disciplinary action when a campus group was found guilty of criminal behavior.

Attendance at the University during the Gilmore administration saw a steady increase from 8,369 in 1934 to 9,084 in 1940. Efforts were made to assist new students in an orientation program during Freshman Week which included lectures, motion pictures of campus life, aptitude tests, mixers, and dances. During the year many campus activities were available to students—dances to name bands at Iowa Memorial Union, programs by student organizations, a University lecture series with famous name speakers, athletic events.

Spectacular football victories under Coach Eddie Anderson in 1939-1940 triggered after-game celebrations, some of which got out of hand. The Silver Shadow, a dry night club on the ground floor of Iowa Memorial Union had the atmosphere of a metropolitan night club with a floor show, a meal, and dinner dancing. No liquor was served and prices were reasonable. It was a student enterprise of great success and won national and international attention. It operated for four years.

Fraternities and sororities had no easy time during this period: they were bothered by financial problems, fell behind in taxes, and in pay-



ments on new homes. Nevertheless, they ranked second in grade point average; dormitory men were highest. President Gilmore approved fraternities and sororities and helped their cause.

Many students had to work, and a cooperative housing system was established. There were six cooperatives for men including Jefferson House, the Manse, Whetstone House, Kellogg, Wilson, and one other; three for women—Tudor Cottage, Russell House, and Breene House. Room and board cost \$15 per month with all members working together to keep expenses down.

Housing for negroes and foreign students was solved by securing homes for negro men and women and through an International House for foreign students provided by Professor George W. Stewart and his wife, Dr. Zella White Stewart.

Students on the campus could exercise their religious needs by membership in such organizations as the Newman Club (Catholic), the Hillel Club (Jewish), the Negro Forum, Roger Williams Club (Baptist), Christian Student Group, Congregational Student Group, Episcopalian Student Group, Wesley Foundation (Methodist), and student associations of the English Lutheran, St. Paul's Lutheran, and Zion Lutheran churches, the Westminster Fellowship (Presbyterian), the Fireside Club, and Student Group of the Reformed Church. Station WSUI opened its day's



program with "Morning Chapel." Parents could send their children to the University confident of the religious opportunities headed by the School of Religion.

Certain curricular developments between 1934 and 1940 received wide attention. One of these was the "Marriage Course" to which several departments contributed; another was the "Campus Course," a synthesis of learning, originated earlier by Professor Benjamin F. Shambaugh. The American Civilization program, sponsored by the School of Letters and the Department of History, attained national recognition. The Writers Workshop, begun in the Jessup administration, reached full development in this period under Director Wilbur Schramm. Well-known authors served on the staff including Robert Frost, Ruth Suckow, Eric Knight, and Wallace Stegner.

The developing arts program at the University had been called by James O'Donnell Bennett of the *Chicago Tribune* "Culture in a cornfield." In 1938, Earl E. Harper, formerly president of Simpson College, became Director of the School of Fine Arts and Iowa Memorial Union. He and Professor Longman, head of the Department of Art, unified the art offerings and gave new impetus to the program. A Festival of Fine Arts, launched in the summer of 1939, brought Lawrence Tibbett and Frank Lloyd Wright to the campus. The Festival included a production of Ellsworth P.



Conkle's play, "Paul and the Blue Ox," and an Art Exhibition of 12 paintings by Grant Wood and 17 by Marvin Cone. A concert by the University Symphony Orchestra, directed by Philip Greeley Clapp, was an outstanding feature of the Festival. This was the beginning of a long series of Summer Fine Arts Festivals.

President Gilmore, who had reached the retirement age of 68 for administrative officials, tendered his resignation on December 30, 1939, to become effective July 1, 1940. The State Board of Education accepted it and Gilmore returned to his professorship in the College of Law. From 1940-1942 he was given a leave of absence to serve as Dean of the College of Law at the University of Pittsburgh and to reorganize the school. His administration at the University of Iowa was characterized by capable stewardship, moral courage, and great common sense.

*State University of Iowa Governing Boards*

1847-1870 . . . . .	Board of Trustees
1870-1909 . . . . .	Board of Regents
1909-1955 . . . . .	Board of Education
1955- . . . . .	Board of Regents